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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003978

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: URIBE 2014 REELECTION PROSPECTS STUMBLE IN
CONGRESS, BUT 2010 EFFORT CONTINUES

REF: BOGOTA 3699

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer
For reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a heated Congressional debate on October 29, the House plenary voted to remove article 19--which would have allowed President Uribe to run for a third term in 2014--from the political reform bill. U Party legislators and other Uribista congressmen voted against the article in an effort to focus reelection efforts on pending referendum legislation that would allow for a possible third Uribe term in 2010. Meanwhile, Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras appears increasingly likely to abandon the Uribe coalition to pursue his own presidential aspirations. Despite Vargas Lleras' likely defection, Uribista congressional leaders tell us they have the votes in the House First Commission to get the referendum bill through the first of the four required congressional votes. End Summary.

Congress Removes 2014 Option

¶2. (U) After a heated debate on October 29, the House plenary chamber voted to remove article 19--which would have allowed for a possible third Uribe term in 2014--from the political reform bill. Article 19 states that a former president who has served two terms as president could run for an additional four-year term after a break from office. The article was tailor-made for Uribe, who is the only living Colombian to have served two presidential terms. The vote precludes further consideration of the 2014 option in the political reform bill, but does not prevent legislators from introducing new legislation to achieve this goal in the future. It also does not impact the legislation pending in Congress that would allow for a popular referendum on whether the Constitution should be amended to allow Uribe to run for a third term in 2010.

Coalition Has Reservations

¶3. (C) Cambio Radical Representative Roy Barreras told us that before the political reform debate took place on October 29, the Uribista coalition held a closed meeting to discuss sacrificing article 19 to facilitate passage of the political reform bill. Barreras said this tactic was pushed and approved by the U Party despite opposition from Cambio Radical legislators. U Party Congressmen and House Secretary General Jesus Rodriguez told us separately that the U Party

favored removal of article 19, since most U Party members prefer that Uribe run in 2010 instead of 2014. Meanwhile, Cambio Radical leader German Vargas Lleras met with Liberal Party President Cesar Gaviria and appears increasingly inclined to abandon the Uribista coalition to pursue his own presidential aspirations.

Liberals Don't Support

¶4. (SBU) Several opposition Liberal Party members told us approval of article 19 would "damage Colombia's democracy," while Representative Carlos Piedrahita said the Liberals oppose any reelection amendment that would only allow Uribe to run. He said some Liberals might support language that would allow for a third Uribe term, as long as it also permitted other former presidents, such as Liberal leader and former President Cesar Gaviria, to run. The Liberal Party walked out of the first debate in the First Commission of the House on October 7 in opposition to the U Party's initial proposal of the article. Gaviria continues efforts to unite opposition leaders in a common front to block a third Uribe term.

Remaining Options for 2010 and 2014

¶5. (SBU) The removal of article 19 from the political reform bill makes the referendum legislation that would allow a possible third Uribe term in 2010 the focus of reelection efforts. The first of four votes on the referendum legislation will occur in the House's First Commission the

week of November 3. Uribista congressional leaders tell us they have the votes to pass the referendum bill in the First Commission despite the likely defection of Vargas Lleras and some Cambio Radical legislators. If the bill passes the four required votes, it then moves to the Constitutional Court for review. If it receives the Court's blessing, a referendum--which would require the participation of 25% of Colombia's registered voters (approximately seven million voters)--would be held sometime after June of next year.

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